

vyagra: I n. 8.

vācanā: I § 5.

vinaya-karma: I n. 41.

vivṛta: II § 2b.iii.

vyūḍha, vyūḍhaka: II § 2b.ii; n. 37.

śamatha: II § 1.

śalākā-grahāṇa, °-cāraka, °-cārana: II § 2b.iii.

śikṣāpadadravyatā-vyavacārah: III n. 47.

sakarna-tuntunaka: II § 2b.iii.

saṅgha: I § 1; II n. 49; *°-karaṇīya*: I § 7; *°-karma*: I § 3; *°-bheda*: II

§ 1a; *māla-°* II n. 41.

saṅghādisesa: I § 3 d; n. 1.

saṅghāvāśeṣa: III n. 6.

saṃmukha: *dharma-°, pudgala-°, saṃgha-°*: II n. 29; *°-karaṇīya, °-vinaya*: II § 2a.

saṃatha: II § 1.

samanu-śrāvay-: I n. 30.

sarvasāṃghika: II § 2b.iii.

sa-vastuka, a-v°: I § 7.

sīmā: I § 1; n. 4; II n. 37.

sūtra-dhara: II § 2b.ii; n. 50.

sthalaṣṭha: I n. 41; II § 2b.ii; n. 45.

sthavira: II § 2b.ii; n. 49.

sthānārha: I § 7; n. 36.

(a-)sthāpanārha: I § 7.

(a-)sthāpanīya: I § 7.

sthūlātyaya: II n. 62.

sthūlārti(-gāmini): II n. 62; III n. 9.

smṛti-vinaya: II § 2c.

The Sambuddhe verses and later Theravādin Buddhology*

1. The Sambuddhe verses in Siam

A short verse text, entitled simply *Sambuddhe* or *Sambuddhe-gāthā*, is well known in Siam. In the *Royal Chanting Book*, it is one of the ancillary texts placed at the beginning of the *Seven Parittas* (*Sattaparitta*) — also known as the *Lesser Royal Paritta* (*Cularājaparitra*) or, in Thai, *Seven Protections* (*Jet Tamnan*) — and the *Twelve Parittas* (*Dvādasaparitta*), also known as the *Greater Royal Paritta* (*Mahārājaparitra*) or *Twelve Protections* (*Sipsong Tamnan*).¹ It is included in the various books of chants that are widely available, and in a Khmer script palm-leaf manuscript in the collection of the Siam Society.² Since the *Seven* and *Twelve Parittas* belong to the liturgy of the Siamese order of monks (*saṅgha*), the *Sambuddhe* verses are familiar to or known by heart by most monks and novices. Here I will give the Pāli of the *Royal Chanting Book*, followed by an English translation.

* This is a revised version of an article first published in the *Journal of the Secretarial Office of H.H. the Supreme Patriarch*, Bangkok, Vol. I, No. 2, January–March 2536 [1993], pp. 73–85.

¹ *Suat mant chabap luang*, 13th ed., Bangkok, 2526 [1983], pp. 3–4 and 32–33, respectively (the second occurrence is abbreviated). For the interpretation of *tamnan* as “protection” I follow Dhanit Yupo, who derives the word from the Pāli *tāṇa*, changed to *tamnā* and then to *tamnān*: see his *Anuphap phraparit* [*The Power of Paritta*, in Thai], Bangkok, n.d., p. 12.

² Oskar von Hinüber, “The Pāli Manuscripts Kept at the Siam Society, Bangkok: A Short Catalogue”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 75 (1987), § 52a, p. 46. The text given by von Hinüber, which might date to the latter part of the 19th century, agrees with that of the *Royal Chanting Book*, with a few minor orthographical variants and misprints.

1.1. Pāli text

(1) *sambuddhe aṭṭhavisañ ca dvādasañ ca sahassake
pañcasatasahassāni namāmi sirasā aham
tesam dhammañ ca saṅghañ ca ādarena namāmi 'ham
namakārānubhāvena hantvā sabbe upaddave
anekā antarāyā pi vinassantu asesato*

(2) *sambuddhe pañcapaññāsañ ca catuvīsatisahassake
dasasatasahassāni namāmi sirasā aham
tesam dhammañ ca saṅghañ ca ādarena namāmi 'ham
namakārānubhāvena hantvā sabbe upaddave
anekā antarāyā pi vinassantu asesato*

(3) *sambuddhe navuttarasate aṭṭhacattālīsasahassake
vīsatisatasahassāni namāmi sirasā aham
tesam dhammañ ca saṅghañ ca ādarena namāmi 'ham
namakārānubhāvena hantvā sabbe upaddave
anekā antarāyā pi vinassantu asesato*

1.2. Translation

(1) With my head I pay homage
to the 500 thousand, 12 thousand, and 28 Sambuddhas;
to their Dhamma and their Saṅgha I respectfully pay homage.
By the power of [this] act of homage
may all misfortune be destroyed
and all variety of danger be removed, without exception.

(2) With my head I pay homage
to the 1 million, 24 thousand, and 55 Sambuddhas;
to their Dhamma and their Saṅgha I respectfully pay homage.
By the power of [this] act of homage
may all misfortune be destroyed
and all variety of danger be removed, without exception.

(3) With my head I pay homage
to the 2 million, 48 thousand, and 109 Sambuddhas;
to their Dhamma and their Saṅgha I respectfully pay homage.
By the power of [this] act of homage
may all misfortune be destroyed
and all variety of danger be removed, without exception.

2. The Sambuddhe verses in Burma

A number of recensions of the *Sambuddhe-gāthā* are said to exist in Burma. The “standard” recension consists of only the first verse of the Siamese version, with one extra line. Whether the remaining two verses are given in other recensions remains to be seen.³ I transcribe here the sole printed version available to me, without any changes.⁴

³ The Sambuddhe verses are included in several manuscripts in German collections: see Heinz Braun and Daw Tin Tin Myint, *Burmese Manuscripts*, Part 2 (Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Band XXIII.2), Stuttgart, 1985, §§ 194, 227, 358.

⁴ My transcription is from a xerox-copy of a small book of *gāthās* for which I do not have any bibliographical data; the division of the verses into three sections follows this text (*ka*, *kha*, and *ga*). Ven. Dhammānanda Mahāthera of Burma, now residing at Wat Tamao, Lampang, has confirmed orally that the version known to him consists of only the first verse of the Siamese version, and that it contains the extra line, which he describes as a “later addition”.

2.1. Pāli text

- (1) *sambuddhe aṭṭhavīsañ ca | dvādaśañ ca sahassake ||
pañcasata sahassāni | namāmi sirasāmahām ||*
- (2) *appakā vālukā gaṅgā | anantā nibbutā jinā ||
tesam dhammañ ca saṅghañ ca | ādarena namām' aham*
- (3) *namakkārānubhāvena | haṃtvā sabbe upaddave ||
aneka antarāyā pi | vinassantu asesato ||*

2.2. Translation

With my head I pay homage
to the 500 thousand, 12 thousand, and 28 Sambuddhas.
The sands of the Ganges are few,
the Conquerors [Buddhas] who have attained nibbāna are
limitless:
to their Dhamma and their Saṅgha I respectfully pay homage.
By the power of [this] act of homage
may all misfortune be destroyed
and all variety of danger be removed, without exception.

The phrase *nibbutā jinā* indicates that the Buddhas belong to the past. The verses are very popular in Burma, where lay-followers often know them by heart. They are held to be highly efficacious in averting calamity, eliminating obstacles, and promoting welfare, and many stories are circulated about their miraculous power. The Sambuddhe Cetiya at Monywa on the Chindwin River, in Sagaing Division to the northwest of Mandalay, represents 512,028 Buddhas. It was apparently built less than 100 years ago.

The Siamese verses pay homage to three groups of Buddhas, numbering 512,028; 1,024,055; and 2,048,109, respectively. As pointed out by von Hinüber, if the first group is x , the second is $2x-1$, and the third $2(2x-1)-1$. A question naturally arises: what is the significance of these rather large numbers of Buddhas, and from what text or texts are the numbers derived? The figures cannot refer to present Buddhas, since it is a firm tenet of the Theravādins that only one Buddha, in the present age Sakyamuni, can exist at one time.⁵ They should therefore refer to past or future Buddhas. In order to suggest a possible explanation of the figures, and to put the question in its proper context, we must first look briefly at the development of the theory of past and future Buddhas according to the Theravādin and other Buddhist schools.⁶

3. The development of the theory of past Buddhas⁷

3.1. The common heritage

Through his own effort Sakyamuni realized enlightenment beneath the *bodhi*-tree near Gayā, and thus became an enlightened or awakened one, a Buddha. Not long afterwards, *en route* to Vārāṇasī, he

⁵ See, however, Heinz Bechert, "Buddha-field and Transfer of Merit in a Theravāda Source", *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35 (1992), pp. 95–108.

⁶ For this subject, see J.Ph. Vogel, "The Past Buddhas and Kāśyapa in Indian Art and Epigraphy", in *Asiatica, Festschrift Friedrich Weller*, Leipzig, 1954, pp. 808–16; I.B. Horner (tr.), *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon*, Part III, London, 1975, Preface to *Chronicle of the Buddhas (Buddhavamśa)*, pp. ix–xvii; Richard Gombrich, "The Significance of Former Buddhas in the Theravādin Tradition", in Somaratna Balasooriya et al. (eds.), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, London, 1980, pp. 62–72; Isshi Yamada (ed.), *Karuṇāpūṇḍarīka*, London, 1968, Vol. I, pp. 121–26.

⁷ References to Pāli texts are to the editions of the Pāli Text Society (PTS), unless otherwise noted. References to Tibetan texts (Q) are to the *The Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, ed. D.T. Suzuki, Tokyo-Kyoto, 1955–61. Chinese texts are referred to by Taishō catalogue (T) number.

met an ascetic (*ājīvaka*) named Upaka. Impressed by the Buddha's appearance, the latter asked, "Who is your teacher (*satthā*)?" The Buddha replied:

I have no teacher. There is no one like me:
in this world with its gods I have no counterpart.
I am the arhat in this world; I am the unsurpassed teacher;
alone I have become fully enlightened;
I have become cool and realized nibbāna.⁸

The Buddha claimed to have realized enlightenment by himself, and to be the only Buddha in the world in his time. He did not, however, claim to have been the only person to have ever become a Buddha. A phrase referring to "those who were arhats, fully enlightened Buddhas in the past...those who will become arhats, fully enlightened Buddhas in the future" occurs in several places in the *Tipiṭaka*.⁹ In the *Gārava-sutta*, Brahmā Sahampati speaks the following verses:

The Buddhas of the past, the Buddhas of the future,
and the Buddha of the present, destroyer of much sorrow,
dwelt, will dwell, and dwell paying respect to the Good
Dhamma:
this is the natural rule for Buddhas.¹⁰

⁸ *Majjhimanikāya* I 171,7 (*Ariyapariyesana-sutta*).

⁹ *Samyuttanikāya* I 140,1-5 (spoken by Brahmā Sahampati), *ye pi te bhante ahesum atītam addhānam arahanto sammāsambuddhā...ye pi te bhante bhavissanti anāgatam addhānam arahanto sammāsambuddhā*; *Dīghanikāya* III 99,17-100,5 (*Sampasādanīya-sutta*, spoken by the Buddha).

¹⁰ *Samyuttanikāya* I 138-40; a (Mūla)Sarvāstivādin version of the sūtra is found in Śamathadeva, *Abhidharmakośapāyikā-tikā*, Q5598 (Vol. 118), *thu* 130b1-132a6; for Sanskrit of the verses only, see Franz Bernhard (ed.), *Udānavarga* (*Sanskrittexte aus den Turfanfunden X*), Vol. I, Göttingen, 1965, XXI,11-12.

In the *Nagara-sutta*, the Buddha gives the following simile: a man travelling in the jungle discovers an ancient road travelled by the people of the past; he follows it, and comes to an ancient city, a royal capital. The Buddha explains that similarly he has discovered an ancient path travelled by the Buddhas of the past, that is, the noble eightfold path.¹¹

It is thus clear that the concept of a plurality of past and future Buddhas is implicit to the early strata of the *Tipiṭaka*, not only of the Theravādins but also of other schools.

The earliest lists of past Buddhas give the names of six predecessors of Sakyamuni, making a total of seven Buddhas. Such lists occur in the *Dīghanikāya*: in verse in the *Ātānātiya-sutta* (DN III 195,27-196,8) and in prose in the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* (DN II 2,15 foll.), as well as in the (Mūla)Sarvāstivādin equivalent of the latter, the *Mahāpadāna-sūtra*.¹² The list also occurs in the *Vinaya* literature: in the Theravādin *Bhikkhu-vibhāṅga* (Vin III 7-9); in the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Prātimokṣa*,¹³ *Śayanāsanavastu*,¹⁴ and *Pravrajyāvastu*,¹⁵ in the

¹¹ *Samyuttanikāya* II 104-7. The Sanskrit version of the Sarvāstivādin school is found in the *Nidānasamyukta*: see Chandrabhāl Tripāṭhī (ed.), *Fünfundzwanzig Sūtras des Nidānasamyukta (Sanskrittexte aus den Turfanfunden VIII)*, Berlin, 1962, pp. 94-106; the *Vinaya* version of the Mūlasarvāstivādin school is lost in Sanskrit but preserved in Tibetan translation in their *Pravrajyāvastu*: see Helmut Eimer (ed.), *Rab tu 'byung ba'i gzhi*, Vol. II, Wiesbaden, 1983, pp. 281,4-289.

¹² The Sanskrit edition of this text is not available to me, but the relevant passage is cited in Tibetan translation by Śamathadeva, *thu* 102a8-103a3, from the *rTogs pa brjod pa chen po'i mdo*. Cf. also Étienne Lamotte, *La Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Vol. I, Louvain, 1965, p. 535 and n. 2.

¹³ Anukul Chandra Banerjee (ed.), *Two Buddhist Vinaya Texts in Sanskrit*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 55,16.

¹⁴ Raniero Gnoli (ed.), *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Śayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu*, Rome, 1978, pp. 27-30.

Lokottaravādin *Mahāvastu*¹⁶ and *Prātimokṣa*,¹⁷ and in other texts of all periods and schools, too numerous to mention.

The seven Buddhas are named in inscriptions and represented “aniconically” on the monuments of Bhārhut and Sāñchī (*circa* 2nd–1st century BCE).¹⁸ From the early centuries of the Common Era they are depicted (sometimes along with Metteyya) in human form in the sculpture of Mathurā and Gandhāra,¹⁹ and, during the Gupta period, in the murals of Ajanta.²⁰ Although tradition placed these Buddhas aeons before Sakyamuni, it also held that certain sites in India were associated with three of his predecessors: the Nigali Sagar pillar of Aśoka (reigned ca. 272–236 BCE) records that the Emperor enlarged the *thūpa* (*thuba*) of Konakamana (Konāgamana) in the fourteenth year of his reign, and that he visited and worshipped it again at a later date,²¹ while the Chinese pilgrims Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang describe various sites in India connected with all three.²² Similar traditions developed in South-east

Asia, for example in Burma, where the Shwedagon Pagoda is believed to enshrine relics of Sakyamuni and his three predecessors.²³

3.2. The Theravādin theory of past Buddhas

A study of the development of the Theravādin theory of past Buddhas must take into account two interrelated aspects: the number of past Buddhas referred to, and the nature and length of the bodhisatta’s career during the many past lives in which he practised the perfections (*pāramī*) and aspired to enlightenment. The career is measured in two types of aeon: the “[ordinary] aeon” (*kappa*) and the “incalculable aeon” (*asankheyya, asankhiya*). The texts give various definitions of the latter; here it should be seen as an extremely large number (“zillions”) of aeons, each of which is in itself long enough to confound the human imagination. It is important to remember that, except in the theory’s earliest phase, all of the past Buddhas were either associated with Sakyamuni himself when he was a bodhisatta, or are associated with certain types of bodhisattas in general. That is, the number of past Buddhas is never closed: a given figure always refers to the number of Buddhas honoured by Sakyamuni or a representative bodhisatta during a specific period of his bodhisatta career. The implications of this will be discussed in the concluding section.

(1) The earliest phase, which is the common heritage of all Buddhist schools, has been described above. It allows a plurality of past Buddhas, and names seven — Sakyamuni and his six predecessors — as in the *Dīghanikāya* and *Vinaya*.

¹⁵ Nalinaksha Dutt (ed.), *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. III pt. 4, [Calcutta, 1950] Delhi, 1984, p. 32,6. The same passage occurs in the *Samgharakṣitāvadāna*: P.L. Vaidya (ed.), *Divyāvadāna*, Darbhanga, 1959, p. 206,8.

¹⁶ Radhagovinda Basak (ed.), *Mahāvastu Avadāna*, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1968, pp. 320 foll; five predecessors (omitting Śikhin) are given in verse at *Mahāvastu* Vol. I, ed. S. Bagchi, Darbhanga, 1970, p. 240,14.

¹⁷ Nathmal Tatia (ed.), *Prātimokṣasūtram*, Patna, 1975, pp. 36–37.

¹⁸ Cf. John Marshall, *A Guide to Sāñchī*, Calcutta, 1955, pp. 57–58 and pl. ii; Alexander Cunningham, *The Stūpa of Bharhut*, repr. Varanasi, 1962, pp. 108–9, 113–16, and pls. xxix–xxx. The representation of the *bodhi* tree and inscription of Śikhin have not been found.

¹⁹ Cf. Alexander Coburn Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China*, Ascona, 1959, pp. 198–99.

²⁰ Vogel, p. 811.

²¹ Cf. E. Hultzsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, Oxford, 1925, p. 165.

²² Alexander Soper, *loc. cit.*

(2) In the next phase, the *Buddhavamsa* names 27 (24 + 3) past Buddhas; when Gotama is counted, there are 25 or 28. The same text,²⁴ along with the *Cariyāpiṭaka*,²⁵ the *Milindapañha*,²⁶ and the *Visuddhimagga*,²⁷ states that the bodhisatta's career lasts four incalculable aeons plus 100,000 lesser aeons. Both the number of Buddhas and the description of the career are unique to the Theravādins. The first two texts are canonical, although modern scholarship holds them to be later additions; the *Milindapañha* dates over a number of centuries, from the 2nd century BCE to the early centuries CE.²⁸ The *Visuddhimagga* was composed by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century. The theories most probably date to the beginning of the Common Era, if not earlier.

(3) The *Suttanipāta-āṭṭhakathā* and *Cariyāpiṭaka-āṭṭhakathā* describe three types of bodhisatta, distinguished by the predominance of one of the three faculties of wisdom, faith, or energy. The length of the career of the first type of bodhisatta is as described in the preceding; that of the second is two times the first; of the third two times the second, with the additional figure of 100,000 aeons remaining constant:

- (i) “strong in wisdom” (*paññā-adhika*), attaining enlightenment in four incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons;
- (ii) “strong in faith” (*saddhā-adhika*), attaining enlightenment in eight incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons;

- (iii) “strong in energy” (*viriya-adhika*), attaining enlightenment in sixteen incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons.²⁹

The *Suttanipāta-āṭṭhakathā* is traditionally ascribed to Buddhaghosa (5th century CE), although doubts have been expressed about his authorship;³⁰ the *Cariyāpiṭaka-āṭṭhakathā* is ascribed to Dhammapāla, who may have worked about the middle of the 6th century.³¹ Neither text enumerates any Buddhas. In the *Dhammapadatthakathā*, also attributed to Buddhaghosa, the Buddha is presented as saying that “many thousands of Buddhas have lived by going for alms”.³² Much later, the theory of the three types of bodhisatta in the form given above was incorporated into Lanna works such as the *Pathamamūlamūlī*.³³

- (4) The next phase is represented by such late Pāli works as the *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna*,³⁴ the *Sambhāravipāka*,³⁵ the *Mahāsampindā-*

²⁴ *Buddhavamsa* II,1 (PTS ed. p. 9).

²⁵ *Cariyāpiṭaka* I,1 (PTS ed. p. 1).

²⁶ *Milindapañha*, PTS ed. pp. 232–34, 289; Mahāmakaṭa ed. pp. 247.7 foll., 365 penult.

²⁷ Mahāmakaṭa-rājavidyālaya edition II 100.

²⁸ See K.R. Norman, *Pāli Literature* (Jan Gonda, [ed.], *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. VII, fasc. 2) Wiesbaden, 1983, pp. 110–13.

²⁹ *Suttanipāta-āṭṭhakathā*, Mahāmakaṭa-rājavidyālaya edition I 58–59; *Cariyāpiṭaka-āṭṭhakathā* tr. by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views*, Kandy, 1978, pp. 325–27. In the latter the three types are equated with the three individuals (*ugghaṭitaññu*, *vipañcitaññu*, *neyya*); see also François Martini (ed., tr.), *Dasabodhisatta-uddesa*, *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 36 (1936), pp. 335 (text), 367–68 (translation); Medhañkara, *Lokadīpakaśāra*, National Library-Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, 2529 [1986], pp. 553–54.

³⁰ See K.R. Norman, op. cit., p. 129.

³¹ Norman, p. 137.

³² *Dhammapadatthakathā* (Mahāmakaṭa ed.) III 164,19 (*Suddhodana-vatthu*), *anekāni hi buddhasahassāni pindāya caritvā va jīvimsu*.

³³ Anatole-Roger Peltier (ed., tr.), *Pathamamūlamūlī*, Chiang Mai, 1991, pp. 8–9, 102–3. Note that both the French (p. 124) and English (p. 192) translations of the first passage give the wrong figure — 12 instead of 16 — for the last type.

³⁴ *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna*, Bangkok, 2526 [1983], Pāli text pp. 3–4.

³⁵ *Phra sambhāravipāka* (Thai translation), Vol. 1, Bangkok, Rattanakosin era 126, pp. 4 foll.; Supaphan na Bangchang, *Vivadhanakār varṇagatī pāli sai phra suttantapīṭak ti taeng nai pradeś thai*, Bangkok, 2533 [1990], pp. 135–50.

nidāna,³⁶ and the *Jinakālamālī*, and by Sinhalese works such as the *Saddharmālaṅkarāya*.³⁷ The theory seems to have first appeared in the Ceylon of the Polonnaruva period (11th–13th centuries CE), but the question of its origins needs further study. Here the career of the first type of bodhisatta is expanded into three stages, according to the nature of his aspiration to enlightenment.³⁸ His career lasts altogether 20 incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons.

- (i) aspiration by mind only, for seven incalculable aeons;
- (ii) aspiration by mind and speech, for nine incalculable aeons;
- (iii) aspiration by mind, speech, and body, for four incalculable aeons.

The texts give breakdowns of the number of Buddhas served in each aeon, along with other details. In the *Jinakālamālī* (which does not calculate the total figure) the breakdown by chapter is as follows:³⁹

<i>Manopanidhānakathā</i>	1	(<i>Purāṇadīpamṛkara</i> , p. 5,24)
<i>Mahānidānakathā</i>	125,000	(p. 7,3)
<i>Atidūrenidānakathā</i>	387,000	(p. 9,3)
<i>Dūrenidānakathā</i>	27	(3 — excluding <i>Dīpamṛkara</i> — p. 9,15, plus 24, p. 19,32 <i>kassapo catuvīśatimo</i>)
Total:		512, 028

³⁶ Handwritten transcription by Ven. Nāṇavāsa, pp. 10–11 (I am grateful to W. Sailer for supplying a copy); Supaphan, pp. 150–57.

³⁷ See the translation or summary from that work in R. Spence Hardy, *A Manual of Buddhism*, repr. Varanasi 1967, pp. 86–97. Cf. *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. III, fasc. 3, [Colombo,] 1973, pp. 359–60; N.A. Jayawickrama, *Epochs of the Conqueror*, London, 1968, p. xix.

³⁸ The three periods are mentioned in the *Cariyāpitaka-āthakathā* (6th century), but not correlated with aeons: see Bhikkhu Bodhi, op. cit., p. 313.

³⁹ A.P. Buddhadatta, *Jinakālamālī*, London, 1960.

The North Indian scholar Daśabalaśrīmitra, writing probably in the 12th or the 13th century, cites an as yet unidentified Theravādin source that gives an accurate account of the theory:⁴⁰

The Ārya Sthaviras state that “Sakyamuni realized omniscience (*sabbaññutā*) after 20 great incalculable aeons plus an additional 100,000 aeons. Herein, as a bodhisatta the Lord served 125,000 Buddhas for [the first] seven incalculable aeons, aspiring for enlightenment by means of mental resolve alone (*bsams patsam nīd kyis*). For the next nine incalculable aeons he served 387,000 Buddhas, engaging in the bodhisatta practices (*bodhisatta-cariyā*) and aspiring by means of mind (*citta*) and speech (*vācā*). For the next four incalculable aeons he served 12 Buddhas, engaged in practices devoted to enlightenment, and aspired for enlightenment by means of body (*kāya*), speech, and mind (*manas*). For 100,000 aeons the Lord, as a bodhisatta, served 15 Buddhas, engaged in the practices of a bodhisatta, and completed all the secondary practices, by means of body, speech, and mind; at the culmination (*agga*) of the 100,000 aeons the Teacher realized omniscience.”

⁴⁰ Q5865, Vol. 146, folio ၁၀၃ ၃၈၄ fol. His work, *An Analysis of the Conditioned and the Unconditioned*, survives only in an anonymous Tibetan translation of a lost Sanskrit original: see Peter Skilling, “The *Saṃskṛtaśaṃskṛtaviniścaya* of Daśabalaśrīmitra”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 4/1 (1987), pp. 3–23.

That the theory became popular is shown by the fact that it was incorporated into vernacular works in Sinhalese,⁴¹ Burmese,⁴² Khün,⁴³ and Lanna Thai.⁴⁴

(5) The next phase is a logical development of the preceding: the theory of the three types of aspiration is applied to the remaining two types of bodhisatta. As before, the length of the career of the second type is twice that of the first, that of the third twice that of the second, and the figure 100,000 remains constant:

- (i) “strong in wisdom”, realizing omniscience in 20 incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons;
- (ii) “strong in faith”, realizing omniscience in 40 incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons;
- (iii) “strong in energy”, realizing omniscience in 80 incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons.

⁴¹ Cf. the introduction to the *Saddharma Ratnāvaliya*, composed by Dharmasena Thera in the 13th century: Ranjini Obeyesekere (tr.), *Jewels of the Doctrine*, Albany, 1991, p. 2. The concept is worked into the narrative in a manner that implies it would be familiar to the readers.

⁴² Not knowing Burmese, I have only one example to offer: P. Bigandet, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama*, Vol. I, repr. Varanasi, 1979, pp. 6–7, 16–17. This is a translation of a Burmese work entitled *Tathāgata-udāna* (Vol. I, Preface, p. xv) which is based on the Pāli *Mālālamkāra-vatthu* (?) (see Vol. II, p. 149, n. 11, and p. 151).

⁴³ Sao Sāimōng Mangrāi, *The Pādaeng Chronicle and the Jengtung State Chronicle Translated*, Ann Arbor, 1981, pp. 99–100. There is some confusion in the figures.

⁴⁴ *Traibhūmi chabap lanna*, Chiang Mai University, 2524 [1981], *phuk ton*, pp. 1–14; *Tamnan Mūlaśāsanā*, Bangkok, 2518 [1975], pp. 1–2, 17–18, etc.

I have not found this theory in Pāli. It is found in a number of Central Thai texts,⁴⁵ and in Lanna texts such as the *Paṭhamamūla*.⁴⁶

(6) One final step could be taken, and it was: the number of Buddhas was described as limitless. In the non-canonical *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*, the Buddha tells Sāriputta that “there have been limitless and countless (*anantāparimāṇā*) noble people in the world who have successively fulfilled the perfections and attained Buddhahood”.⁴⁷ A similar statement is found in the *Dasabodhisatta-uddesa*, where the Buddha tells Sāriputta that “there have been Buddhas without end (*buddhā anantā ahesum*): I would reach the end of my life before I reached the limit of the enumeration of Buddhas”.⁴⁸ The apocryphal

⁴⁵ Nāgapradīp (ed.), *Sambhārvipāka*, Bangkok, 2504 [1961], pp. 246–47; *Phra Śrī āry bistār, kāṇḍ 5*, folio 33a; [Somdet Phra Vanarat], *Phra Mahāpurusalakṣaṇa*, Bangkok, 2504 [1961], pp. 34–35; *Phra Śrīvisuddhisobhaṇa* (Vilāśa Nāṇavaro, P. Dh. 9), *Munināthadipanī*, Bangkok, 2516 [1973], pp. 37–46; Gaṇa Sahāydharm, *Phra Śrī-ariyamettraiy*, Bangkok, 2535 [1992], pp. 8–10.

⁴⁶ *Pathamamūla*, in *Lokuppatti arunavatīsūtra pathamamūla pathamakap lae Mūlatantraiy*, National Library-Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, 2533 [1990], pp. 115, 152 (the text of the former passage is corrupt, and gives the figures 22, 4, and 80). The *Pathamamūla* is another version of the *Pathamamūlamūlī* cited above; it is interesting that the two recensions incorporate different versions of the theory. For the origin myth presented in these and related texts, see Emmanuel Guillon, “The Ultimate Origin of the World, or the Mūlā Muh, and Other Mon Beliefs”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 79/1 (1991), pp. 22–30.

⁴⁷ H. Saddhatissa, *The Birth-Stories of the Ten Bodhisattas and the Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*, PTS, London, 1975, text p. 119, tr. p. 54. (The long introduction [pp. 1–53] gives a valuable survey of sources on past and future Buddhas, although I do not always agree with the Ven. author’s conclusions.)

⁴⁸ *Dasabodhisatta-uddesa*, text p. 297, tr. p. 337.

Ākāravatta-sutta speaks of “Buddhas as many as the sands of many Ganges rivers”.⁴⁹

Available archaeological or epigraphic evidence for the development of the Theravādin theory is scanty and late. A Pāli inscription giving a verse list of the 28 Buddhas and dating from the middle of the 11th century was discovered at Thaton in Lower Burma;⁵⁰ the verses (known in Ceylon as the *Ātavisi-pirit*) are incorporated without title into the *Ātānātiya-paritta* of the *Twelve Parittas* in the *Royal Chanting Book*.⁵¹ The 28 Buddhas were in full vogue during the Pagan period (11th–12th century), whether in mural or sculptural art or on terracotta tablets.⁵² In Lanna art, ornamented carved wooden stands (*phaeng*) were made to hold numbers of small Buddhas: 28, or larger numbers.⁵³ Larger numbers of Buddhas are also found on tablets of the Pagan period, which depict rows of identical Buddhas totalling 50 or about 100 figures;⁵⁴ tablets with 500 Buddhas are known in Siam.⁵⁵ Such tablets may well be related to the theories discussed above: one

⁴⁹ Padmanabh S. Jaini, “Ākāravattārasutta: An ‘Apocryphal’ Sutta From Thailand”, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 35/2–3 (July 1992), § 6, *ane kāya gangāya vālukuppamehi buddhehi*.

⁵⁰ G.H. Luce, “The Advent of Buddhism to Burma”, in L. Cousins, A. Kunst, and K.R. Norman (eds.), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner*, Dordrecht, 1974, p. 133. Cf. also n. 53 (p. 137), which needs confirmation and clarification.

⁵¹ *Suat mant chabap luang*, p. 39.

⁵² Thiripyanchi U Mya, *Votive Tablets of Burma*, Part I, pls. 10, 72, 108, 110; Gordon H. Luce, *Old Burma-Early Pagan*, Vol. III, New York, 1970, pls. 65–67.

⁵³ *Muang Boran Journal* 14/2 (Apr.-June 1988), pp. 93, 94; *Muang Nan: Boranagadi, Prawatisat lae Silpa*, Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, 2530 [1987], pp. 145, 226.

⁵⁴ U Mya, pls. 8, 36, and 43, 46, 107, 109, respectively; Luce, *Old Burma-Early Pagan*, pl. 68.

⁵⁵ See *The Silpakorn Journal* 33/3 (July-August 1989), p. 8, found at Wat Chamadevi, Lamphun, dated to the 10th–12th century CE.

might even speculate that the figures 50 or 500 are abbreviated references to the first figure, 512,028, and the figure 100 to the second figure, 1,024,055. Tablets with 55 Buddhas from Wat Mahādhātu in Sukhothai⁵⁶ might represent the 55 Buddhas of the 1,024,055 of the second verse; like the 28 of the 512,028, this would be a significant group with its own identity. But these interpretations are by no means certain: texts of about the same period extol the merit gained from reproducing the image of the Buddha, and may also have influenced the tablets.⁵⁷ An Old Burmese ink-gloss from Wetkyi-in Kubyauk-gyi at Pagan refers to “past or future Buddhas...be they more in number than the grains in a heap of earth”. The Wetkyi-in Kubyauk-gyi has been tentatively dated to “not later than 1200 CE”.⁵⁸

In a Burmese inscription from the Thahte Mokku temple at Pagan, dated 558 or 59 Sakka era (1195 or 96 CE), the concept of a bodhisatta career lasting four incalculables plus 100,000 aeons is incorporated into the dedication. The editors note that “after the fall of Pagan the phrase becomes a cliché, many inscriptions beginning with [a similar phrase]. Here we have probably its first appearance in Burmese.”⁵⁹ In literature a parallel phenomenon is seen in the Pāli *Jinamahānidāna*,⁶⁰ and in the Sinhalese *Saddharma Ratnāvaliya* and

⁵⁶ Illustrated in Piriya Krairiksh, “A New Dating of Sukhothai Art”, *Muang Boran Journal* 12/1 (Jan.-March 1986), p. 42, fig. 14.

⁵⁷ Cf. verses in Richard F. Gombrich, “Kosala-Bimba-Vanṇā”, in Heinz Bechert (ed.), *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries*, Göttingen, 1978, pp. 299–302.

⁵⁸ Col. Ba Shin, K.J. Whitbread, G.H. Luce, et al., “Pagan, Wetkyi-in Kubyauk-gyi, an Early Burmese Temple with Ink-glosses”, *Artibus Asiae* XXXIII/3 (1971), pp. 195, 217 (for dating).

⁵⁹ Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce, “Inscriptions of Burma, Portfolio I”, *Bulletin of the Burma Historical Commission* III (1963), pp. 102–7.

⁶⁰ *Jinamahānidāna*, National Library-Fine Arts Department, Bangkok, 2530 [1987], Vol. I, p. 1.

Lanna *Pathamamūla* and *Mūlaśāsanā* referred to above — the mention of the bodhisatta's career is a formula and not an integral part of the text.

The *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna* is included in a list of books donated to a monastery at Pagan in 1442;⁶¹ a verse from the same text, summarizing the four rebirths of the bodhisatta that directly preceded his first encounter with a Buddha is cited (with some variants) in a Pāli inscription from Bassein, dated to the 15th or 16th centuries.⁶² The same text may also be referred to in a Sukhothai inscription from the first half of the 14th century, with reference to future Buddhas.⁶³ In the modern period, the theory is very much alive: in 1986 a temple called Cetiya Vihāra Sambuddhe enshrining 512,028 Buddhas was constructed in Mae Sot district, Tak, in imitation of the temple at Monywa in Burma referred to above.⁶⁴

3.3. The theory of past Buddhas in other Buddhist schools

We have seen above that the concept of a plurality of past and future Buddhas and the list of seven past Buddhas are part of the

⁶¹ Mabel Haynes Bode, *The Pali Literature of Burma*, [London, 1909] Rangoon, 1965, § 95, p. 104; G.H. Luce and Tin Htway, "A 15th Century Inscription and Library at Pagan, Burma", in O.H. de A. Wijesekera (ed.), *Malalasekera Commemoration Volume*, Colombo, 1976, § 95, p. 229.

⁶² Mons. Charles Duroiselle, "Bassein", *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* 1929–30 (repr. Delhi, 1990), pp. 158–60; cf. *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna* verse 23. A similar verse is found in the *Sambhāravipāka* (S. Thammaphakdi, Bangkok, 2504, p. 28).

⁶³ *Prachumsilacharuk*, Vol. I, Bangkok, 2467, p. 48: lines 38–39 of face 2, *mahānidāna*; Praset Na Nagara and A.B. Griswold, *Epigraphic and Historical Studies*, Bangkok, 1992, No. 10, pp. 371–72; introduction to *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna*, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁴ Supamat Kasem, "A unique temple with half a million Buddha images", *Bangkok Post*, Vol. XLI No. 235, Section Three, Monday, August 25, 1986.

common Buddhist heritage. In order to place the development of the Theravādin theory in a broader context, I will briefly describe the theories of some other schools. In contrast to the theory of four (or the later figure of 20) incalculables plus 100,000 aeons of the Theravādins, a basic figure of three incalculables was adhered to by the Vaibhāśikas of Kashmir, the Mūlasarvāstivādins, the Sāmmatiyas, and some Mahāyānists. Since the scriptures of most of the "18 Buddhist schools" are lost, our information about the overall development of Buddhism in India is incomplete. In the present case, we have access to the texts of the schools mentioned above, plus those of the Lokottaravādin branch of the Mahāsaṃghikas for some points.

3.3.1. The Vaibhāśika and Mūlasarvāstivādin theory of past Buddhas

Daśabalaśrīmitra quotes a text of the Vaibhāśikas of Kashmir, which describes Sakyamuni's service to 75,000 Buddhas in the first incalculable aeon, 76,000 in the second, and 77,000 in the third. Verses with the same figures are found in the *Bhaisajyavastu* of the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivādins.⁶⁵ The three incalculable aeons were followed by a period of 91 lesser aeons during which Sakyamuni served a number of other Buddhas.⁶⁶ The *Bhaisajyavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Vinaya* gives a verse description of the bodhisatta's past lives under various Buddhas, and the acts of worship or service that he performed for each; this is followed by a prose list of the names of 60 past Buddhas.

⁶⁵ Q1030, Vol. 41, ge 254b6 foll.

⁶⁶ Daśabalaśrīmitra 37b3 foll. For these sources, see the discussion in E. Obermiller (tr.), *History of Buddhism (Chos-hbyung)* by Bu-ston, Part I, Heidelberg, 1931, pp. 102–4. The figure 91 refers to the fact that Vipassīn arose 91 aeons before Sakyamuni.

3.3.2. The Sāmmatiya theory of past Buddhas

Daśabalaśrīmitra reports the theory of the Sāmmatiya school as follows:

According to the Sāmmatiya school, “The present Sakyamuni served 77,000 Buddhas in the first incalculable [aeon], starting with the former Buddha Sakyamuni; in the second incalculable he served 76,000 Buddhas, and in the third incalculable he served 75,000, ending with the Buddha Indradhvaja. He then realized true and complete enlightenment (*samyaksambodhi*).”⁶⁷

The Sāmmatiya figures agree with those of the Vaibhāśikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins, except that the order is reversed. The total is the same: they agree that as a bodhisatta Sakyamuni served 228,000 Buddhas over a period of three incalculable aeons, to which the Vaibhāśikas and Mūlasarvāstivādins add a period of 100 aeons (in general, but in the case of Sakyamuni only 91).

3.3.3. The Lokottaravādin theory of past Buddhas

The Buddhology of the Lokottaravādins is given in two sections of the *Mahāvastu*.⁶⁸ Many past Buddhas are listed in succession by name; various details are given, including the relationship of some of them to Sakyamuni as a bodhisatta. Several texts or layers of text seem to be conflated, and it is difficult to detect a coherent system in the mass of names and aeons. There is, however, a list of 16 past Buddhas

(including Sakyamuni), similar to those found in the *Mahāśītavana-sūtra*, the *Mahākarunāpūṇḍarīka-sūtra*, and the Chinese **Abhiniskramana-sūtra*.⁶⁹ Elsewhere Sakyamuni tells Mahāmaudgalyāyana that as a bodhisatta he worshipped countless Buddhas.⁷⁰

3.3.4. The Mahāyāna and past Buddhas

Adherents of the Mahāyāna accepted the literature of the Śrāvaka schools, subjecting it to new interpretations. They generally agreed that the bodhisatta’s career lasted three incalculable aeons; a second theory gave the figure 33,⁷¹ while the great Tibetan scholar Bu ston Rinpoche discusses theories of 3, 7, 10, and 33 as found in various Indian texts.⁷² Numbers of past Buddhas are mentioned in the vast Mahāyāna sūtra literature. As seen above, the *Mahākarunāpūṇḍarīka* lists 14 past Buddhas; the *Lalitavistara* lists 55 (or, in the Chinese translation by Dharmarakṣa, 48);⁷³ both lists end with the well-known seven past Buddhas (who always retained their popularity in the Mahāyāna, as in the Śrāvaka schools). The *Bodhisattva-piṭaka* describes Sakyamuni’s meeting with various past Buddhas,⁷⁴ and mention of individual Buddhas connected with Sakyamuni in the (often very distant) past are scattered throughout the Mahāyāna sūtra literature.

⁶⁷ Daśabalaśrīmitra 37b1.

⁶⁸ *Mahāvastu* I 32–44; III 300–331. For an English translation see J.J. Jones (tr.), *The Mahāvastu*, Vol. I, London, [1949] 1973, pp. 39–52; Vol. III, London, [1956] 1978, pp. 219–39.

⁶⁹ *Mahāvastu* I 32,2; cf. also 39,15.

⁷⁰ Daśabalaśrīmitra 40b6 foll.

⁷¹ Obermiller, Vol. I, pp. 119–27.

⁷² Cf. Yamada, op. cit., p. 126, n. 2.

⁷³ Quoted by Bu ston in Obermiller, Vol. I, pp. 125–27.

There are also lists of past Buddhas associated with Buddhas other than Sakyamuni. The *Sukhāvatīyūha* lists 80 (in a Sanskrit recension) or 53 (in a Chinese translation) Buddhas who preceded Lokeśvararāja, under whom the future Buddha Amitābha made his vows as the bodhisatta monk Dharmākara.⁷⁵ Another 53 Buddhas of the far-distant past are named in the *Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Two Bodhisattvas, King of Healing and Supreme Healer*, translated into Chinese in about 424 CE.⁷⁶ The *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra* names 1,000 past Buddhas connected with the bodhisattas who will become the 1,000 Buddhas of the “Auspicious Aeon” (*bhadrakalpa*),⁷⁷ and the names of another 1,000 past Buddhas are invoked for protection in a sūtra translated into Chinese during the Liang dynasty (502–57).⁷⁸

But no list or lists were held to be authoritative, and there is no evidence that the Mahāyāna developed a single theory of past Buddhas. Even a single text such as the *Sūtra on the Contemplation of the Two Bodhisattvas* referred to above mentions in a single breath the seven Buddhas of the past, the 53 Buddhas, the 1,000 Bhadrakalpa Buddhas, and the 35 Buddhas.⁷⁹ (Such anomalies are only to be expected. The Mahāyāna was not a monolithic movement with a single geographical or historical centre; rather, it is a general name applied to diverse streams of thought that developed in far-flung areas of India over many centuries, united primarily by their exaltation of the bodhisatta ideal. Furthermore, some of these streams gave more emphasis to “present Buddhas”, such

⁷⁵ Soper, 200–201.

⁷⁶ *Fo-shuo kuan yao-wang yao-shang erh-p'u-sa ching* (T 1161), tr. in Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha*, Boulder, 1979, pp. 130–32.

⁷⁷ Dharma Publishing, *The Fortunate Aeon: How the Thousand Buddhas Become Enlightened*, Vol. IV, Berkeley, 1986, pp. 1480–1733.

⁷⁸ *Kuo ch'ü chuang yen chieh ch'ien fo ming ching* (T 447): Soper 201–2; M.W. de Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, Paris, 1928, pp. 380–81.

⁷⁹ Birnbaum, p. 133.

as Amitābha or Akṣobhya, or to “transcendental Buddhas” such as Vairocana.) In his commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, dGe 'dun grub, the First Dalai Lama, states that “according to the Mahāyāna, [the bodhisatta] worshipped limitless Buddhas in each incalculable”.⁸⁰ A similar idea is found repeatedly in Mahāyāna sūtras, which mention innumerable Buddhas not only of the past but also of the present.

4. The development of the theory of future Buddhas

4.1. Future Buddhas and the Theravāda

We have seen above that, like the Buddhas of the past, the Buddhas of the future are referred to in the plural in the Pāli canon. In the early texts only one future Buddha, Metteyya, is named, and only in one place, in the *Cakkavattisīhanāda-sutta*.⁸¹ Later Theravādin texts such as the *Dasabodhisattuppatti-kathā*⁸² and *Dasabodhisatta-uddesa*⁸³ give the names and “biographies” of ten future Buddhas, starting with Metteyya; the latter text promises that a person who worships the ten Sambuddhas will not be reborn in hell for 100,000 aeons.⁸⁴ The *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna* mentions 510 bodhisattas who will become

⁸⁰ *Mdzod tig thar lam gsal byed*, Varanasi, 1973, p. 270, 1, *theg chen pas ni grañ med pa re re la yan / sans rgyas dpag tu med pa la bsñen bkur byas par bžed do.*

⁸¹ Cf. *Dīghanikāya* III 75–76 and *Dīghanikāya-āṭṭhakathā* (Nālandā ed.) II 97.

⁸² See H. Saddhatissa, op. cit. For this, the following work, and related literature, see Supaphan Na Bangchang, pp. 190–204.

⁸³ See F. Martini, op. cit. The (unpublished) thesis of Pharn Wong-Uan, *Anāgatavāmsa* (1980), gives a study, critical edition, and Thai translation of this work.

⁸⁴ *Dasabodhisatta-uddesa*, text p. 334, tr. p. 367, *ime dasa ca sambuddhe yo naro pi namassati, kappasatasahassāni nirayam so na gacchati.*

future Buddhas.⁸⁵ In the *Dasabodhisattuppatti-kathā*, the Buddha tells Sāriputta that the number of beings who will become Buddhas in future is limitless and countless (*anantāparimāṇā*), and states that he himself cannot count the future Buddhas.⁸⁶

There is even less archaeological evidence for the ten bodhisattas than for the 28 or more Buddhas. A Sukhothai inscription from the time of King Līdayya (Mahādharmarāja I) dated to CE 1361 refers to “Metteyya, etc., the ten bodhisattas”;⁸⁷ an Ayutthaya period chant lists their names.⁸⁸ They are depicted in 18th century Ceylonese painting at the Dambulla caves and at the Malvatta and Kulugammana Rājamaha Vihāras in Kandy District.⁸⁹ The wish to become a Buddha in the future occurs in inscriptions and colophons. A Pagan period terracotta tablet gives the aspiration to become a Buddha of Thera Ānanda;⁹⁰ the Sukhothai period monk Śrīsaddhā performs a successful “act of truth” (*saccakiriyā*), starting “If it is true that I shall attain omniscience and become a Buddha...”.⁹¹ King Līdayya also was “fully

resolved to become a Buddha”.⁹² Such aspirations could not be made if the number of future Buddhas was not held to be open.

4.2. Future Buddhas and other Buddhist schools

The cult of Metteyya or Maitreya was accepted by all known Buddhist schools. I have not found any lists of future Buddhas in the works of the Vaibhāśikas, Mūlasarvāstivādins, or Sāmmatiyas. The *Bhaīṣajyavastu* and *Śayanāśanavastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Vinaya* name only one future Buddha, Maitreya.⁹³ In the first decade of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *Avadānaśataka*, the Buddha predicts the future Buddhahood of ten individuals, but these are only examples, and are not meant to make up a definitive list. The number of future Buddhas is open.

Daśabalaśrīmitra reports that “according to some, five Buddhas arise in this very ‘Auspicious Aeon’ (*bhadrakalpa*); according to others, 500; and according to still others, 1,000”.⁹⁴ Interlinear notes in the Peking edition attribute the first theory to the Sthaviras, the second to the Sāmmatiyas, and the third to the Mahāyāna.⁹⁵ While the first and last are amply confirmed by other sources, the ascription of 500 Bhadrakalpa Buddhas to the Sāmmatiyas cannot be confirmed.

Three Sarvāstivādin texts in the Central Asian language of Uighur refer to 500 Bhadrakalpa Buddhas. Two of these are Maitreya

⁸⁵ *Sotatthakī-mahānidāna* v. 629 (text p. 96), *dasuttarā pañcasatā bodhisattā samuhatā*. I am not certain of the derivation here of *samuhata*, but the figure is clear. The phrase is spoken by the Buddha in answer to a question put by Ānanda, “How many [bodhi]sattas have you predicted?”

⁸⁶ *Dasabodhisattuppatti-kathā*, tr. p. 54, text p. 119.

⁸⁷ *Prachumsilacharuk*, Vol. I, p. 103: lines 12–13 of face 3, *ariyametteyyādīnam dasannam bodhisattānam....* See also Prasert and Griswold, *Epigraphic and Historical Studies*, No. 11, pt. 1, pp. 424 foll. (repr. from *The Journal of the Siam Society* 61/1).

⁸⁸ Supaphan Na Bangchang, pp. 195–96.

⁸⁹ H. Saddhatissa, pp. 20–21 and plates I and II.

⁹⁰ Luce, *Old Burma-Early Pagan III*, pl. 68, *ānandattherena katañ rūpan / tena buddho homi*.

⁹¹ Prasert and Griswold, op. cit., p. 392.

⁹² Prasert and Griswold, pp. 496–97.

⁹³ *Bhaīṣajyavastu*, loc. cit., *Śayanāśanavastu*, p. 30.

⁹⁴ Daśabalaśrīmitra 42b5.

⁹⁵ The notes are not found in the Derge edition (“Karmapa Reprint”, *dbu ma ha*, 139b6–7).

texts of the *Maitrisimit* class,⁹⁶ while one is a confessional text for laity.⁹⁷ Two commentaries by two different authors on two different sections of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya* give the same figure. The *Vinayavastutikā*, a commentary on the *Vinayavastu* by the *Sūtra Expert* (*sūtradhara*) Kalyāṇamitra, states that “Fortunate Aeon is a classification of time (*kālaviśeṣa*): it is auspicious because in it 500 *Tathāgatas* arise”. The *Vinayavibhaṅga-padavyākhyāna*, a commentary on the *Vinaya-vibhaṅga* by Vinitadeva, states that “a great Fortunate Aeon is a beautiful aeon (*sundara-kalpa*), because in it 500 Buddhas arise”.⁹⁸ The *Ch'i fo fu-mu hsing-tzu ching*, a recension of the *Mahāpadāna-sutta* of unknown school which was translated into Chinese between 240–54 CE, states that “in this *bhadrakalpa* there will be a full 500 Buddhas”.⁹⁹ Since adherents of the 500 Bhadrakalpa Buddhas would agree that four Buddhas, including Sakyamuni, have already arisen, this means that 496 Buddhas are yet to come, starting with Maitreya.

The *Bahubuddha-sūtra* of the *Mahāvastu* of the *Mahāsāṃghika* Lokottaravādins names only Maitreya,¹⁰⁰ but elsewhere the *Mahāvastu*

⁹⁶ Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline*, Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley, 1991, n. 30, pp. 23–24, referring to Sinasi Tekin (ed., tr.), *Maitrisimit*, Vol. 1, Akademi Verlag, Berlin, 1980, p. 44,11–16 (not seen); *Das Zusammentreffen mit Maitreya: die ersten fünf Kapitel der Hami-Version der Maitrisimit*, in Zusammenarbeit mit Helmut Eimer und Jens Peter Laut herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert von Geng Shimin und Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Teil I, Wiesbaden, 1988, p. 75.

⁹⁷ Nattier, loc. cit., referring to Jan Nattier (ed., tr.), *Ksanti qilmag nom bitig, An Uighur Confession Text for Laity*, unpublished manuscript, 1974 (not seen).

⁹⁸ Q5616, Vol. 122, 'dul 'grel vu, 85b7.

⁹⁹ Nattier, loc. cit.

¹⁰⁰ *Mahāvastu* III 319,3; 323,4; 327,4; 328,4.

states that 1,000 Buddhas arise in the Auspicious Aeon.¹⁰¹ The names of 1,000 future Buddhas are invoked in a *sūtra* translated into Chinese in the first half of the 6th century.¹⁰² This figure was widely disseminated in the literature of the Mahāyāna, for example in such perennially popular *sūtras* as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*.¹⁰³

5. A solution to the *Sambuddhe* riddle?

Now, after a detour of several aeons, we may return to the *Sambuddhe* verses. The texts agree that the Buddha Sakyamuni is an example of the first type of bodhisatta:¹⁰⁴ that is, his career lasted either four or twenty incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons. Since in traditional Buddhology the career of a bodhisatta or the acts of a Buddha are stereotyped — what applies to one applies to all — all bodhisattas of the first type should presumably, like Sakyamuni, encounter 512,028 Buddhas. That figure in the first verse may therefore represent either the number of Buddhas honoured by Sakyamuni, or by the first type of

¹⁰¹ *Mahāvastu* III 437,10. The text here is confused, and contains several lacunae. While the mention of 1,000 Buddhas might be an interpolation, it is followed by an incomplete description of the extent of the radiance of a number of Bhadrakalpa Buddhas, past and future; this suggests that at least the later Lokottaravādins accepted the figure. The names of the future Buddhas do not agree with those given in the *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra*. See Jones' notes in *The Mahāvastu*, Vol. III, p. 322.

¹⁰² *Wei lai hsing su chieh ch'ien fo ming ching* (T 448): see de Visser p. 381.

¹⁰³ Cf. Soper pp. 200–202, Nattier, loc. cit., and references and discussion in Peter Skilling, “Buddhist Literature: Some Recent Translations” (particularly the review of *The Fortunate Aeon*), *The Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 80/1 (1992).

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *Jinakālamāli* 1,26–2,1, *amhākam bhagavā kappasatasahassādhikāni cattāri asaṅkheyāni pāramiyo pūretvā buddhabhāvam patto paññādhiko nāma paññindriyassa balavattā*.

bodhisatta in general.¹⁰⁵ It follows that the figure 1,024,055 of the second verse could refer to the second type of bodhisatta, and the figure 2,048,109 of the third verse to the third type of bodhisatta, since the multiples are similar. In the (apocryphal) *Arūṇavatī-sutta*, the past Buddha Sikhī is said to have fulfilled the perfections for eight incalculable aeons plus 100,000 aeons; this means he was a bodhisatta of the second type.¹⁰⁶ In the *Jinakālamālī*, Dipamkara, Purāṇasakyamuni (plus several other past Buddhas), and Metteyya, the next Buddha, are described as bodhisattas of the third type. Thus the three figures of the *Sambuddhe* verses might well refer to the number of Buddhas encountered by the three types of bodhisattas of the past, present, and future. I have not, however, found a text to support this.

When and where were the *Sambuddhe* verses composed? At present I cannot suggest an answer. If the Burmese version, which refers to only 512,028 Buddhas, is the original, it could have been composed by the 11th century, by which time the idea of the “longer career” lasting 20 incalculable aeons seems to have appeared. Further research into Ceylonese, Burmese, Mon, and Shan sources, both epigraphic and literary, must be conducted before even an approximate date for the two higher figures can be suggested.

The tradition reported by such texts as the *Sotatthakimahānidāna* is the final and most developed theory of the Theravādins. The number of past Buddhas served by Sakyamuni as a bodhisatta surpasses that given by other Śrāvaka schools, as does the

¹⁰⁵ Since the Burmese version gives only the first figure, and since the extra line places the Buddhas in the past, that version might refer only to the Buddhas honoured by Sakyamuni.

¹⁰⁶ *Arūṇavatī-sutta* in *Lokupatti arūṇavatī...* (see n. 46) p. 43,8, *sikkhī bodhisatto kappasatasahassādhikāni aṭṭha asamkheyyāni pāramiyo pūretvā...*

duration of his career, even in its shortest and earliest form as four aeons.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the Theravādins adopted a theory of ten perfections (*pāramī*) against the six of Śrāvaka schools such as the Vaibhāśikas, Mūlasarvāstivādins, Sāmmātiyas,¹⁰⁸ and Lokottaravādins,¹⁰⁹ or of some Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*. By classifying these under three grades they obtained a total of thirty,¹¹⁰ again surpassing the figures given by other Śrāvaka schools, and also the mainstream Mahāyāna. On the subject of Buddhology the Theravādins were far from conservative: they seem to have been the most innovative of the known Śrāvaka schools. That this tendency began at an early date is shown by the fact the theories of four aeons and thirty perfections occur in the canonical *Buddhavāṃsa*, by the beginning of the Common Era.

The three figures given in the *Sambuddhe* verses are not final, and the greatest figure of 2,048,109 is not the maximum number of Buddhas of either the past or the future. The figures only represent the number of Buddhas served by the three types of bodhisattas. In the first case, each of the 512,028 Buddhas would, during his own career, have

¹⁰⁷ Note, however, that Vinītadeva’s *Nikāyabhedopadarśana-samgraha* attributes to the Mūlasarvāstivādins a theory that “a bodhisatta attains [enlightenment] in from ten to thirty incalculable aeons” (Q5641, Vol. 127, u 190a4, *byāṇ chub sems dpa’ ni bskal pa graṇs med pa bcu phan chad nas sum cu tshun chad kyis ’grubo*). If this reference can be confirmed by other sources, it would suggest a development parallel to that seen in the Theravādin school.

¹⁰⁸ See Daśabalaśrimitra 171a8, “great bodhisattas, after cultivating the six perfections for three incalculable aeons...realize enlightenment” (*byāṇ chub sems dpa’ chen po rnams ni skal pa graṇs med gsum du pha rol tu phyin pa drug spyad pas...yaṇ dag par rdzogs pa’i sans rgyas su ’gyur ro*).

¹⁰⁹ *Mahāvastu* III 302,3.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Buddhavāṃsa* I 76–77 (PTS ed. p. 6); *Apadāna*, *Buddhāpadāna*, *Mahāmakutārajāvidyālaya* ed. (Vol. 32) p. 2,2. For a thorough study of the *pāramīs*, see H.R.H. Princess Mahā Chakri Sirindhorn, *Dasapāramī in Theravāda Buddhism* (*Dasapāramī nai buddhaśāsanātheravād*, in Thai), Bangkok, 2525 [1982].

served either 512,028, 1 million plus, or 2 million plus Buddhas, and each of those Buddhas would, in the course of their own quests for enlightenment, have done the same, in each case depending on the type of bodhisatta. The same may be said for future Buddhas. Thus the number of Buddhas implied by the *Sambuddhe* verses stretches towards infinity in both past and future. This late Theravādin Buddhology is reflected in other chants, such as in the lines that follow the verses of homage to the seven Buddhas in the *Ātānātiya-paritta*: *ete c' aññe ca sambuddhā anekasatakoṭayo*, “these and other Sambuddhas, many thousands of millions”.¹¹¹ As seen above the Burmese *Sambuddhe-gāthā* adds a line referring to limitless Buddhas, compared to whom the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River is insignificant.

The Theravādin theory seems to describe a full circle, from the open plurality of past and future Buddhas of the earliest texts to the open infinity of past and future Buddhas of the latest texts. The “infinity” of Buddhas is implied but unstated in the earliest, pan-Buddhist theory: in a *Samsāra* that has no beginning or end there must arise in succession Buddhas without beginning or end. The “infinity” of Buddhas completes the idea of the earliest texts by expressing what was left unsaid. It does not contradict the various numbers of Buddhas, past or future, given by the Theravādin or other schools: such figures refer in all cases to specific groups of Buddhas in relation to other Buddhas or to certain periods of time (as, for example, the 512,028 Buddhas served by Sakyamuni), and

are not in themselves final. The figures only make sense when the number of Buddhas is seen to be open.

Theravādin scholars are often uncomfortable about the later, developed Buddhology. Ven. Dharmānanda notes that the “longer career” of the bodhisatta—and hence the numbers of Buddhas given in the *Sambuddhe-gāthā*—need not be accepted, since it is not found in the *Tipiṭaka* or the *Āṭhakathā*; he further suggests that such theories do not conform to the *Mahāvihāra*, and might derive from the *Abhayagiri*. If I have described these theories as Theravādin in this article, it is because they are presented in Pāli works transmitted only (as far as we know) within the Theravādin Vinaya lineage. It is sometimes suggested that the theories derive from Mahāyāna influence, but the evidence is against this. The Buddhas arise serially, in succession: only one Buddha arises at a time; never, as in the Mahāyāna, do multiple Buddhas exist in the present. Only five Buddhas arise in the Auspicious Aeon. There is no hint of Mahāyāna doctrines such as the ten levels (*daśabhūmi*) of a bodhisatta or the three bodies (*trikāya*) of a Buddha, and the description of the career of a bodhisatta—whether as four incalculables plus 100,000 aeons or more—or of the three types of bodhisatta are unique to the Theravādins, as are the numbers of past Buddhas, from the figure 28 of the *Buddhavaṃsa* upwards. Furthermore, the Theravādin theories bear no formal resemblance to those of the other Śrāvaka schools. Direct copying or imitation of other Śrāvaka schools or of the Mahāyāna may therefore be ruled out.

Certainly, however, there would have been mutual influence, since no school existed in isolation. Some of the past Buddhas stand out as common to several lists. The theories of the different schools have a common origin in the sense that, during the several centuries on either side of the beginning of the Common Era, there seems to have been a preoccupation with the past lives of the Buddha and the path to

¹¹¹ *Suat mant chabap luang*, pp. 21.2, 40.1. In the latter, the verse comes at the end of the *Ātavisi-pīrit* verses discussed above. Luce’s transcription of the last line of the Pāli, *etesañeva sambuddhā anekasattako...*(the text continues in old Mon) suggests that the inscription included this verse, which is not found in the modern printed versions available to me. This would date the verse to the 11th century.

Buddhahood: that is, the bodhisatta career. During this period the bodhisatta theories of these schools, including the Theravādins, were formulated; during this period the Mahāyāna began to take shape—not as the initiator of the theories of the bodhisatta career, but as a result of the speculation on that subject.

At any rate, the *Sambuddhe* verses are concerned with power and protection, and not with philosophy or Buddhological speculation. Their efficacy derives from the large number of Buddhas invoked, and, although this is unstated, from the *pāramī* of Sakyamuni or other bodhisattas who honoured or will honour Buddhas of these numbers during the many aeons of their bodhisatta careers. The concept of protection against calamity derived from the recitation of the name or epithets of the Buddha is an old one. It is enshrined, for example, in the ancient and canonical *Dhajagga-sutta*, a popular *paritta* in which the Buddha recommends the recitation of the *iti pi so* formula as a protection against fear. Other canonical *parittas* derive their power from the recitation of the names of *pacceka-buddhas*, as in the *Isigili-sutta*,¹¹² or of various deities, as in the *Mahāsamaya* and *Ātānātiya Suttas*, as do non-canonical *parittas* such as the *Mahādibbamanta* and the *Uppātasanti*. The power of texts like the *Ākāravatta-sutta* and the *Yot phrakantraipidok* stems from combinations of the *iti pi so* formula with the concept of *pāramī*.¹¹³ The invocation of the “power of the name”

¹¹² *Majjhimanikāya* 116, Vol. III, *Uparipannāsa*. Note that at the end the text seems to recommend that homage be paid “to these and other mighty *pacceka-buddhas*...without limit” (PTS ed. p. 71.3, *ete ca aññe ca mahānubhāvā pacceka-buddhā...parinibbutte vandatha appameyye*). I.B. Horner (*The Middle Length Sayings* III, London, 1967, p. 113), interprets the passage as “praise all these immeasurable great seers who have attained final nibbāna”.

¹¹³ For these texts, and for *paritta* in general, see Peter Skilling, “The *Rakṣā* Literature of the Śrāvakayāna”, *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* XVI (1992), pp. 116–24.

occurs in Mahāyāna sūtras such as the sūtras on the 1,000 past and 1,000 future Buddhas referred to above (there is also a parallel sūtra on the 1,000 present Buddhas). The *Names of 5,453 Buddhas*, a text preserved in Tibetan translation, names that many Buddhas, who are not placed in time or space; verses at the end promise protection.¹¹⁴ The *Sambuddhe* verses may be unique in invoking the power of the largest number of Buddhas in the fewest words.

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¹¹⁴ *Sans rgyas kyi mtshan lha stoñ bži brgya lha bcu rtsa gsum pa*, Q928 (Vol. 36), *mdo zu*. The text, which has no translators’ colophon or *nidāna*, consists entirely of names, often long and awkward, in the formula “homage to...”, concluding with twelve lines of verse spoken by the Buddha. The colophon to the Stog Palace edition (§ 95) notes that the transmission of the text was confused. A Chinese parallel (T 443) was translated in 594 A.C. For the invocation of the names of the Buddha, see *Hōbōgirin* III 209–10 (Butsumyō).